

Area couple's book tells story of Belleville history

By JUDSON BRANAM

Press Staff Writer

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BELLEVILLE — While longtime residents of a community often develop an interest in its history, not many are willing to invest large amounts of money and effort to see that history organized into a book.

Park and Edna Mae Gregory of Belleville are among the few who have undertaken such a project.

After many hours of research and an investment of more than \$20,000, their hopes of keeping Belleville's historical materials available to future generations were realized in September, with the publication of "See Again: A Pictorial History of Belleville."

The book relies on local newspaper accounts and governmental meeting minutes, along with 550 photographs, to tell Belleville's history through the last century.

In addition, several chapters deal with special events and aspects of the town's history, such as the Belleville High School fire of 1953; a transcribed tape of a 1976 luncheon in which 15 then-current and former city/village officials discussed their memories of the town; and photographs of all present-day businesses, churches and schools in town preserved for future historians.

It also includes the family trees of several longtime Belleville families.

Park said his favorite section of the book deals with an 1886 murder that happened on Main Street, when one participant in a barroom brawl that had spilled outside took



Press photo by Paul Hurschmann

The Gregorys at their home 'office' in Belleville.

a shot at another, striking a bystander. The intended target, Park said, was the grandfather of current Belleville City Council member Richard Akens.

To prepare the 540-page book, the Gregorys spent about a year and a half researching, compiling and typing full-time, after years of gathering material for its own sake.

"We're sort of history buffs," said Park, a retired

chemistry, physics and electronics teacher in the Belleville and Taylor schools, "so we'd latch onto something interesting and file it away, never thinking we'd put it into a book."

The idea of a book came about when the Gregorys looked for some photos they knew a late acquaintance had owned.

"His relatives had lost

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EMU to present lunch lectures

MANILA, Philippines — At least 500 people were killed when giant waves churned up by typhoon Nina smashed coastal towns and villages on southern Luzon island's Sorsogon province. Scores of people were missing, more than 1,000 were injured and hundreds of thousands were homeless after the typhoon struck late Wednesday night.

500 killed in storm

BERLIN — Two 22-year-old East Berliners fled to West Berlin by swimming across the icy waters of a canal. Police said the two men, drenched and cold, walked into a bar following their daring swim. They were then taken to West Berlin police where they explained their escape.

2 E. Berliners escape

area of western China. People traveling in about 300 vehicles were stuck on a steep and narrow 22-mile stretch of highway between the Xinjiang provincial capital of Urumqi and the town in Yining near the Soviet border.

Russian fish, a 24-year-old computer company financial officer from Madera, Calif.

Free dog and bird care clinics will be held Tuesday and Dec. 8 for pet owners by the Humane Society of Huron Valley. Tips on feeding, health care, grooming and training will be provided to dog owners on Tuesday, and to bird owners Dec. 8. There will be demonstrations of their dogs and birds.

Dog, bird clinics planned

Hunt is teaching art courses to 2 p.m.

An opening reception will be held for Hunt from 3 to 6 p.m. Monday in EMU's Ford Gallery, located in Ford Hall on EMU's campus.

Sculpture and graphics by artist Richard Hunt will be on display Monday through Dec. 22 in Eastern Michigan University's Ford Gallery.



Hunt, 52, has works included in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Museum of the Twentieth Century in Vienna, Austria and dozens of private collections.

Dawn Farm, a drug rehabilitation program in Ypsilanti So far, \$492,039 has been raised by the non-profit group. To accept the Kresge challenge grant by the Kresge Foundation as part of a \$750,000 building project. The 14-year-old program wants to build a residence facility on its farm on Stony Creek Road. To help pay for construction, Dawn Farm launched a fund-raising drive in

Works of EMU art teacher to be displayed on campus

at EMU this year as the university's 1987-88 McAndless Professor in the Humanities. Hunt, 52, has works included in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, Museum of Modern Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Whitney Museum of American Art, Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Museum of the Twentieth Century in Vienna, Austria and dozens of private collections.

Dawn Farm receives Kresge's \$100,000 grant

Information, call Sandy Prochazka, 663-3042. Senior Citizens Recreation

Book

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them," Park said, "and we realized that a lot of the history of Belleville was just being lost, so we tried to find as much as we could and put it into a book so it would be around for a while."

Their book is the third effort at preserving area history, but the first devoted exclusively to Belleville. In 1930, Samuel Robbe published "The History of Van Buren Township," and in 1977, Cathy Horste and Diane Wilson's "Water Under the Bridge: A History of Van Buren Township" was published with support from the township's bicentennial commission.

The Gregorys said they chose to quote directly from the old Belleville Enterprise issues to give modern readers as much "feel" for the language and events of the day as possible.

Those clippings include many gems such as:

— "Farmers Beware! There are sharpers around the country who are selling ... hens' eggs for \$75 per dozen and agreeing to purchase all chickens hatched from these eggs at \$100 each. The enterprise is safe, for

the sharper, the eggs are all cooked (April 21, 1886)."

— "We chronicle two sad accidents for Monday in our little town. One man burnt down his hen coop while trying to fire out the chicken lice and a dog had his head cut off on the railroad (June 16, 1886)."

— "A light weight son put in an appearance at Robert Franciscoes last week. Another subject for the measles, chickenpox and whooping cough (April 11, 1888)."

— "The blacksmiths here are wearing broad smiles on account of the slippery times for horses (Dec. 23, 1903)."

Since the book's release, the Gregorys said they have received positive comments from throughout the community, with adults and children alike "extremely enthusiastic about the book," Park said.

Edna added that "It really makes you feel proud when people say they like it so much," to which Park replied, "We've worried over it so much that I'm just relieved that it's done and

it's appreciated."

The book is the second major investment the Gregorys have made in preserving Belleville's heritage. After learning that the French explorer LaSalle passed through the area, the Gregorys paid \$17,000 to see a statue of him erected in Victory Park. The book's cover includes a drawing of the statue, and the book opens with "The LaSalle Saga."

"Anything worthwhile costs you money nowadays," Edna explained. "I could probably spend \$17,000 and drive a Cadillac, but I'd rather leave something of value to everybody."

Besides, Park added with a laugh, the statue is "better than a \$17,000 tombstone down at Hillside (Cemetery)."

The book sells for \$23, which Park said is "a few pennies less than it cost us to publish it." He said about half of its 1,000-copy printing is still available for sale. Copies can be obtained from the authors, 375 Brain Ave., Belleville, 48111.